Arthur Miller's The Crucible
A Portrait of a Non-Conformist Hero

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Arthur Miller' The Crucible was first performed on January 22, 1953 at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York. It gained public and critical appraisal and it won the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson awards as the most distinguished American drama of the year[1]. In this play Miller presented one of the modern issues which is individual freedom versus conformity, but he chose the historical play to present this issue. The events of the play dated back to 1693 but he wrote the play in 1953, a period of political dispute in America. Many people were suspected of being Communists and were subject to series of investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. The investigations to find communists created fear and suspicion in the American society in that period. Because of the parallel between the Salem witch hunt which was described in the play and the general political atmosphere in the fifties, the play was considered as an attack on McCarthy's misuse of authority. Arthur Miller was summoned by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He was accused of being a communist. He refused to name others as communists and finally, he was fined and given a thirty days pended jail sentence.[2] However, The Crucible should not be understood as being a play that criticised this period only. Though Miller created parallels between issues that occured in different periods of time, he presented a universal massage and that is the reason why the play was successful. It is not about a particular issue in a particular society, but it is about a universal issue which is non –conformist attitude in dealing with the external pressures practised on the individuals. It raises impotrtant questions such as: how should man deal with the attempts to make him conform to the commonly accepted values of his society? Can he keep his integrity and self - steem when he refuses to comply with the social demands? John Ferres points out that "the witch trials confront the mind with another age-old question:How should we respond to evil?And its equally ancient corollary:What if the evil lies in us?"[3]

In the opening scene, Miller describes the opressive social millieu in which all the characters live. One of these characters is Reverend Parris who is praying near the bed of his daughter Betty while she lies motionless. Miller describes Parris in the stage directions as a man with unpleasant personality who develops a feeling of being victimized and persecuted by others who are under his social or religious authority. Betty's illness leads Parris to send for Reverend Hale of Beverly to help him to discover the real reason of her illness. What increases the tension within Parris's mind is that he has seen his daughter and his niece , Abigail, dancing like heathen in the forest short time before his daughter's sickness. He believes that

Abigail is practising witchcraft and his daughter's illness is the result of Abigail's evil influence upon her.Other girls who"clearly missed motherly affection and family security"[4]were involved in witchcraft. This is the incident on which Miller built his drama, through this incident Miller exposed the Puritanic society and how it reacts . People in that theocratic community felt horrified as they heard the news because of "the greatest adversary of their theocracy or God-governed state."[5] However, the way they deal with this issue reveals their hypocricy and lack of morality. Through this incident, Miller shows the destructive effect of imposing restrictions on the individuals which will lead to chaotic consequences. The inhibtion and the strict way of bringing children up leads these girls to express their need for freedom in this distorted way. The individual freedom in that society was obliterated through the process of preserving religious values. Conformiy is of prior importance in order to protect that society from evil. After the discovery of the girl's involvement in witchcraft, Parris investigates Abigail about Betty's mysterious illness:

Abigail: Uncle, we did dance, let you tell them I
confessed it and I'll be Whipped if
I must be. But they're speaking of whichcraft.
Betty's not whitched.
Parris: Abigail, I cannot go before the congregation
when I know you have not opened with me.
What did you do with her in the forest?

(I.P.139)

Abigail develops a fascination in whichcraft though she tries incessantly to deny the charge. This facination is the result of her unconscious yearning to get acquainted with everything that lies beyond the limits of the strict society. Her dance with Betty and the other girls is an expression of the girls' yearning to break loose from the restrictions of society.This society subjects its members to persecution which led them to develop a wilful sense of community to guard them against any alien teachings coming from outside forces.

Abigail's relationship with Proctor was one reason why she decided to accuse Proctor's wife, Elizabeth, of practising withchcraft. Her feelings of frustration after Proctor's refusal to go on in this relationship led her to accuse his wife of practising magic.

Abigail: Give me a word John. A soft word.
Proctor:No, no , Abby. That is done with.

(I.P149)

Proctor refused to be involved in such a relationship because it is against the commonly approved values of society. Besides, he knows well that society does not find it wrong to interfere in the personal matters of its members. For that reason,

Proctor stands firm in the face of Abigail's attempts to go on in this illegal and socially disapproved relationship. He had a sense of guilt, he knows that if he submits to Abigail's emotions , he will then put an end to her threats, but at the same time , he knows that if he does that he will stain his reputation and his hidden sin of adultery will be revealed. His sense of guilt makes him condemn his behaviour. Elizabeth is right when she points out that the judge who pursues him so mercilessly is his conscience.

Proctor:No more! I should have roared you down when

first you told me your suspicion. But I wilted, and like

a christian, I confessed. Confessed! Some dream

I had must have mistaken you for God that day.

But you're not, you're not and let you remember it!

Let you look sometimes for that goodness in me, and judge me not. Elizabeth: I do not judge you. The magistrate is in your

heart that judges you. I never thought you but a good man John.

(II.P.178)

John has an inner conflict because he cannot expose his own sin to bring down Abigail. What complicates the situation is Hale's visit to Proctor's house. Hale is "an intellectual , proud of his specialized knowlege of the devil, a theorist whose blind ignorance of what 'authority' may do with his learning drags him weeping into degredation."[6] He wants to judge Proctor's character by measuring it against the commonly known standards of religion. When Hale asked Procor about the commandments , he recited them except one which is adultery. This reflects his unconcious desire to obliterate from his memory his affair with Abigail.His feeling of guilt torments him and he looks for a way out of this dilemma.

Proctor tries to face Abigail's wicked accusations by bringing Mary Warren, his servant to testify that she and the other girls were only pretending to be under the effect of witchcraft. She admits that she had only been pretending to faint in the court, but Abigail is clever enough to face Mary's charge by pretending to shiver and the other girls follow. They accuse Marry of bewitching them. This scene reflects "the psychology of the court itself. Like so many other organizaions, it is concerned above all with its own survival and acts most savagely when in danger of being discredited."[7] Proctor couldn't restrain himself from leaping at Abigail and calling her a whore. He confesses his affair with her and explains that Elizabeth dismissed her when she discovered it.

It is evident that Abigail excersises great power over her friends. Besides, her feelings towards Proctor leads her to accuse his wife of witchcraft. She expresses her rebellion against the strict and repressive Puritan society through this behaviour . The brutal death of her parents is another reason for her frustrated conduct. W.David Sievers poins out that Abigail and the other people of Salem are

> Pent-up, frustrated individuals [who] use the witch-hunt to vent their personal spleen and vengeance to obtain neighbor's land by accusing him , and in the case of Abigail, to get rid of her lover's wife. The sadistic witch trial thus becomes a kind of mass catharsis for the village, a volcanic eruption from deep psychic sources in a rigidly repressed community.[8]

Procor shows strength of character as he is questioned by a corrupt authoriy whose representatives are deceived easily by a group of girls. His courage is conrasted with the weakness of the represenatives of authority. They try to invade his privacy , to look for any conduct which might be considered unchristian. He found himself "caught in the tangled web he has woven between his wife , friends, and the entire Salem community. Proctor did not want to be a part of the trials and was forced to make imporant decisions."[9] He is forced to sign a confession. Hale tries to convince Proctor's wife to get him to sign a confession to save his life "Life, woman, is God's most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it. I beg you, woman, prevail upon your husband to confess."(IV. P.241) but she replies :"I think that be the devil's argument."(IV, P.241) which means that Proctor knows within himself what he will do and what he should do. She knows that he will not yield to them and no one else can change his mind because the life that he wants to live is "the life of spiritual freedom and moral integrity."[10]He reveals the solidity of his characer in two critical situations, the first one when he refuses to go on in his affair wih Abigail in spite of her desperate attempts to seduce him again, and the second when he stands firm while he faces all the pressures exerted by the court members in order to make him sign a confession that he deals with the devils, and to testify that he saw the other six prisoners practising magic, and thus he will support the court's opinion. His refusal to take part in transforming the guilt to other people distinguishes him from the rest of the accused. He does not want to dishonour his name. Richard Hays points out that Proctor is

> so patently the enemy of hysteria that his very existence is a challenge to the fanatic temperament , and he is consumed by its malice . What gives the situation a fresh vitaliy is Miller's really painful grasp of its ambiguities: The dilemma of a man , fallible, subject to pride, but forced to choose between the 'negative

> good' of truh and morality, and the 'positive good'
> of human life under any dispensation.[11]

when Danforth asks Proctor to give an explanation of his refusal to sign a confession paper, proctor said

> Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another
> in my life! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet
> of them that hang! How may I live without my name?
> I have given you my soul, leave me my name!
> (IV. P.250)

Proctor is distinguished as a non-conformist hero not only because he does not bend in front of the pressures practised by the court in order to lead him to incriminate other people, but also because he is able to expose his own fallibiliy and to denounce himself publically as a sinner. This admission leads his wife to confess that she does not give him the love that he needs.

> Elizabeth: John, I counted myself so plain, so poorly
> made, no honest love could come to me!
> Suspicion kissed you when I did; I never
> knew how I should say my love. I were
> a cold house I kept.(IV. P.245)

Elizabeth realizes her flaws after hearing Procotor's admission of being a sinner. She draws her courage from his firm behaviour in the court. She undergoes a change in her feelings towards Proctor. At he beginning she condemns his adulterous behaviour, but at the end she "acquires a tolerance for human fallibiliy and an appreciaion for human goodness during her trial and imprisonment"[12]Besides, she expresses her pride of her husband's characer when he sacrifices his life in order to save his soul and his name.

> Elizabeth: He has his goodness now. God forbid I take
> it from him. (IV. P. 252)

It is in the final scenes of the play that both Proctor and Elizabeth reach to a mutual understanding of each other. This cannot be achieved wihout acknowledging their own faults.

Elizabeth realizes that Proctor has attained his real freedom when he admits his sin of adultery. He frees himself of a burden that torments him for a long time. Gerard Weales argues that

> Proctor is enough a product of his society to
> think of himself as a sinner for having slept
> with Abigail Williams, so he carries a burden
> of guilt before he is charged wih having consorted
> with the devil . When he is finally faced with
> the choice of death or confession his guilt

as an adulterer becomes confused wih his

innocence as a witch; one sin against society

comes to look like another.[13]

Finally, Proctor finds a way out of this situation by asserting his individuality in spite of the attempts to make him comply to the demands of society. Therefore, through Proctor, the playwright made "a statement for the subject of a free man's fight against emotional terrorism to put him down."[14]

The critical test that John Proctor faces is whether he will accept the martyrdom of Giles Cory and Rebecca Nurse or choose to save himself. He himself proposes the question of whether a single man accepts martyrdom by clinging to principles which he has not hold. He thinks that the saintly Rebecca Nurse may accept martyrdom because it suits her character but he is sinful and he is wondering whether or not it is hypocrisy to stand for his principles when he is a sinner. He is not an ideal person but he could not set a good example to his children if he gives up his name readily in order to protect himself. The question that Proctor poses is whether lying to save himself is a sin worse than being involved in magic or to make a decision that directly leads to his death,he "has the strength to stand up to the morally bankrupt society and dies in defense of truth."[15] In this stage, he believes that he lost all goodness.

Proctor: I am not saint. Let Rebecca go like

a saint, for me it is fraud!(IV,P.246)

Neil Carson points out that Proctor is "overwhelmed by a sense of worthlessness. He agrees to confess because he feels unworthy to be ranked with the saintly Rebecca and feels that such a confession could not corrupt him more."[16] but in the final scenes of the play, he attains his redemption at the cost of his own life. He tears his signed confession after realizing that if he does not do that, he would lose his goodness for ever. In tearing his confession he has found a way to regain his lost goodness. Proctor reveals a high level consciousness of his situation and this consciousness helps him to take a decision and to make his final victory.

Notes

[1] Neil Carson, ***Arthur Miller***, (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.,1982), P. 17.

[2] Alice Griffin, ***Understanding Arthur Miller***, (Columbia:University of South Carolina Press, 1996), P.7.

[3] John H. Ferres, "Introduction" *in* ***Tentieth Century Interpretations*** **of** ***'The Crucible'***"ed. John H. Ferres. (Englewood Cliff's, N.J:Prentice –Hall, Inc., 1969), P.7.

[4]I.L.Baker, ***The Crucible***, (London:Pan Educational, 1974), P.14.

[5]Ibid., P.19.

[6]Eric Mottram, "Arthur Miller:The Development of a Political Dramatist in America" *in* ***Arthur Miller:A Collection of Critical Essays***, Robert. W. Corrigan, ed., (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969), P. 34.

[7]Ronald Hayman, ***Arthur Miller***, (London:Heinmann, 1970), P.46.

[8]W. David Sievers, ***Freud on Broudway: A History of Psychology and American Drama***, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1070), P.497.

[9] An Internet Source"Arthur Miller's ***Death of a Salesman*** and ***The Crucible***.(***WWW. Studyarea.com***).

[10] Dennis Welland, ***Miller, The Playwright***, (London:Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1983), P.61.

[11] Richard Hays, "***H***ysteria and Ideology in ***The Crucible***" in **Commonweal 57**, (February, 1953), P.498.

[12]Leonard Moss, ***Arthur Miller***, (Boston:Twayne Publishers, 1967), P.64.

[13]Gerald Weales, "***Arthur Miller***," in ***The American Theatre***, ed. Allen S. Dawner, (Washington: Voice of America, 1967), P.99.

[14]. An Internet Source"Arthur Miller's ***Death of a Salesman*** and ***The Crucible***.(***WWW. Studyarea.com***).

[15] Carson, P.73.

[13] An Internet Source(***http://play.about.com***).

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